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MAY 23, 2006

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UNITED STATES SENDS FLU MEDICINE TO ASIA

Health secretary announces shipment at World Health Assembly

By Charlene Porter
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States is sending a shipment of the anti-viral medication Tamiflu® to Asia, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael Leavitt announced May 22.

He made the announcement during a session with reporters on the sidelines of the World Health Assembly in Geneva.

"I'm pleased to announce that the United States government has just deployed treatment courses of Tamiflu to a secure location in Asia," Leavitt said. He declined to reveal the size of the shipment or its precise destination, adding that it will be in place by the end of the week. The medicine is being pre-positioned in case of a human outbreak of influenza that could escalate into a pandemic.

Rapid diagnosis of a lethal strain and a swift response to contain and control its spread are key steps in an international strategy to prevent a dangerous influenza strain from developing into a pandemic.

Concerns that a deadly form of flu could sweep the world have risen over the last two years as a new, highly pathogenic form of avian influenza has shown its ability to infect and kill humans.

The H5N1 flu strain so far does not appear to be contagious among humans, but health authorities warn that it could become so at any time.

Refining international pandemic response plans and encouraging all nations to develop preparedness plans will be important matters on the agenda at the World Health Assembly, Leavitt said.

He is also anxious to work with other donor nations on a plan to coordinate efforts to assist lesser-developed nations in influenza detection and response. At an international conference in Beijing in January, donor nations pledged \$1.9 billion to help countries most susceptible to widespread outbreak.

H5N1 already is considered a pandemic disease among birds because this deadly viral strain has caused the death or destruction of more than 200 million birds so far.

Leavitt said he wants to make sure that donors coordinate their efforts so their contributions are spent most effectively.

The United States has pledged \$334 million to international pandemic preparedness, and is spending more domestically on research, Leavitt said.

“We’ve been making significant investments in vaccines, significant investments in anti-virals [medications] and research,” Leavitt said. “The research is likely to benefit not only citizens of the United States, but citizens of the world.”

RESEARCH, PLANNING UNDER WAY

Leavitt announced earlier in May that the United States will spend \$1 billion to help pharmaceutical companies speed development of new vaccine manufacturing technologies. The United States also has contributed to successful efforts to improve diagnostic methods so that H5N1 infection can be identified positively within a matter of hours, as contrasted to the days-long testing procedure previously used.

Intensive research also is under way to identify different actions that local officials can take to contain an outbreak of disease if it occurs.

Called “mitigation strategies,” these actions include closing schools, limiting or closing public facilities such as libraries, concert halls and theaters to reduce the chances

of disease transmission. Leavitt said the United States will share the results of these findings with communities worldwide. “If we’re to protect our nation, we need to protect the people of the world and work together to protect the people of the world,” Leavitt said.

The U.S. health secretary said pandemic preparedness must be guided by four principles: transparency, rapid reporting, sharing of data and scientific cooperation.

Leavitt also expressed regret at the sudden death of WHO Director-General Dr. Lee Jong-wook. Lee died early May 22 after emergency surgery two days before to relieve a blood clot on the brain.

RICE SAYS INTERNATIONAL FORCE URGENTLY NEEDED TO STABILIZE DARFUR

NATO asked to provide logistics support for U.N. peacekeeping force

By Jacquelyn S. Porth
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice says it is time to deploy a United Nations peacekeeping force to Darfur to help stabilize conditions there.

Although the United States has worked hard to help broker the comprehensive peace agreement for Darfur, Rice said more help is needed from the international community and urged countries like China and Russia to help focus the world’s attention on the ongoing conflict in Sudan.

Rice, in May 21 comments to newspaper reporters in Boston, said she has argued for the rapid deployment of a U.N. peacekeeping force strong enough to offer the people of Darfur protection from the terror they have been experiencing.

The United States has asked the North Atlantic Treaty Organization formally to provide logistical support for a U.N. peacekeeping force.

Too many people have died, Rice told reporters, adding, “It’s really time to get a peacekeeping force in that can help.”

For more information on U.S. policies, see Darfur Humanitarian Emergency.

IRAQ'S NEW GOVERNMENT

Rice also discussed the installation of the new government in Iraq, saying the country finally has a permanent government that does not have to be distracted by organizing elections or writing a constitution.

The new Iraqi government comprises a considerable number of Sunnis, she said, which is good because the Sunnis have tended to be disaffected in the past and did not participate much in the January elections. Greater Sunni involvement may provide the opportunity "for those who wish to leave the course of violence and the insurgency" to turn instead to politics as a means for promoting change, she said. Over time, as the Iraqi people "see their interests as more associated with the political process and less . . . with the rejectionist philosophy," the secretary said, "I think you're going to see the Iraqis stabilize the situation." But it will not occur overnight, she warned.

For more information on U.S. policies, see Iraq Update.

IRAN

On Iran, Rice said Iranian officials "have engaged in behavior that has made the entire international community suspicious of what it is they're up to." That is why the International Atomic Energy Agency is asking pertinent questions of Tehran, she said, and why IAEA director Mohamed ElBaradei "continues to report that he's not getting satisfactory answers from the Iranians."

The United States is not alone in its concern that the Iranians "may be building a nuclear weapon under cover of civilian nuclear power," Rice said. So far, she added, the Iranians have done little to bolster the international community's confidence that their country is pursuing only a civil nuclear program.

For more information on U.S. policies, see Arms Control and Non-Proliferation.

TRADE WITH CUBA

Rice was also asked about the possibility of selling Vermont-produced agricultural products to Cuba. She noted that Cuba is not part of an open trade system because "every economic activity benefits Fidel Castro."

The U.S. trade embargo exists, she said, "to prevent Fidel Castro's dictatorial regime from using commerce and trade to fund and strengthen his regime so that he keeps his hold on the Cuban population." Rice reminded her questioner that Cuba is the only remaining non-democratic state in the Western Hemisphere and almost every economic activity in Cuba benefits the current regime in Havana.

U.S. HELPING CHINA WITH "CLEAN ENERGY" DEVELOPMENT

U.S. Caterpillar, China's JMG companies sign \$56 million contract

By Jane Morse
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Technical assistance from the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) has resulted in the signing of a \$56 million contract between the U.S. company Caterpillar Inc. and China's Shanxi Jincheng Anthracite Coal Mining Group (JMG).

According to a USTDA announcement released May 19 in Beijing, the contract covers the provision of gas engines and other equipment and services for a 120-megawatt coal mine/coal bed methane power plant that will be owned and operated by JMG and its partners.

USTDA had funded technical assistance to JMG as part of the ongoing U.S. effort to promote clean energy resources in China based on the country's abundant coal supply while strengthening U.S. commercial interests.

In 2004, USTDA provided a \$502,850 grant to JMG for preliminary project design, technical specifications and procurement assistance related to the implementation of the innovative power plant project. The USTDA funding supported a contract between JMG and SCS Engineers Inc. of Long Beach, California. SCS assisted JMG in defining equipment specifications and facilitated the bid evaluation of equipment suppliers.

The \$120 million power plant project, which has received funding support from the Asian Development Bank, will be the largest power facility of its type in the world. The project will help spur greater Chinese efforts

to produce clean coal-based power in Shanxi province, one of the country's principal coal-producing provinces and one of the more polluted provinces in terms of air quality. The project demonstrates the growing cooperation between U.S. and Chinese energy-sector interests in using clean energy sources targeted under the Asia Pacific Partnership for Clean Development and Climate, a priority energy and environmental initiative of the Bush administration.

Since 2001, USTDA has funded more than 80 activities supporting important development objectives in China.

U.S., JAPAN FAIL TO REACH FINAL AGREEMENT ON REOPENING BEEF TRADE

Japan accepts results of U.S. audit at talks;
timeline for action needed

By Susan Krause
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Negotiators from the United States and Japan ended two-and-a half days of talks in Tokyo May 19 without reaching final agreement on conditions for the restoration of U.S. exports of beef and beef products to Japan, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Chuck Lambert, USDA's acting under secretary for agriculture, marketing and regulatory programs, met with reporters following the talks. He said the Japanese government accepted an in-depth audit report prepared by the U.S. government, but the two sides did not establish a timeline for resolving the trade impasse, which has continued for four months.

The U.S. report included results of a review of 25 U.S. meat-processing plants that shipped beef products to Japan between December 12, 2005 -- when Japan partially lifted a two-year ban on imports of U.S. beef -- and January 19, 2006, when Japan reinstated that ban. The report also included an audit of the 35 plants that are eligible to export to Japan under a USDA-administered Export Verification Program. Japan first banned imports of U.S. beef in December 2003, when a case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or "mad cow" disease) was discovered in the United States. After intensive discus-

sions, Japan partially lifted that ban in December 2005, agreeing to accept imports of U.S. beef and beef products from cattle less than 20 months of age. But it restored the ban after finding bone fragments in a shipment of veal one month later.

Lambert said the auditors had verified that the processing plants were implementing rules properly, including new measures imposed by Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns after the January incident. "The result of those audits has shown that all product that was produced conformed to the requirements of Japan, and that the plants knew and understand and were meeting the requirements of the market for Japan," he said. Some minor "procedural" issues must be corrected before the two sides can move forward, according to Lambert. He said he expected these problems to be resolved before the end of May.

"We have a pathway," he said. "The government of Japan will sort out its thoughts; they will conduct additional risk communication and get feedback from the public, and then a final agreement as to when and timing and extent of audits that will follow will take place." The United States has proposed that Japan lift its suspension of the 35 plants, allowing all to resume shipments at the same time, with the end of June the preferred target date, Lambert said.

Japanese officials expressed doubt that the matter could be resolved so quickly, the acting under secretary said. Lambert said the United States has done its part to resolve the matter, conducting a full investigation as soon as it became aware of the problem with the veal shipment, preparing a 475-page report, and making officials available to the government of Japan to respond to any additional questions.

"We have asked the Japanese government to move forward in an expedited fashion so that we can lift the suspension and resume trade," Lambert said. He emphasized that the United States has implemented protective measures that far exceed international standards, such as those recommended by the World Animal Health Organization, in order to export to Japan.

"We have a saying in the U.S. that, 'where there's a will, there's a way,'" he said. "We stand ready to work with our counterparts in Japan to help facilitate those audits so that trade can resume in a timely fashion."

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